



WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS:
THE EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

by

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Room at the Top: Moving Women Into Administrative
Positions in Social Welfare

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BACKGROUND

Administration

Administration is a field of human experience, a dynamic process that involves knowledge and understanding of the business enterprise in which the process takes place, knowledge and understanding of human behavior, human relations, and human organizations as well as knowledge of and skill in the managerial functions of planning, organizing, directing, staffing, coordination, resource development, budget, and lastly, but by far one of the key functions: decision making.

If you accept this definition you can see that the professionally educated social worker is knowledgeable in at least two of the three required knowledge areas - knowledge of social work technology and knowledge of human behavior.

Administration and management are used interchangeably in today's literature. Herman Stein, a social worker, states "administration is a process of defining and attaining the objectives of an organization through a system of coordinated and cooperative effort."¹

Koontz and O'Donnell, from the business field, state "managing is the creation and maintenance of an internal environment in an enterprise where individuals working together in groups, can perform efficiently and effectively toward the attainment of group goals."²

These definitions are very similar.

Drucker adds to the definition that "efficiency is concerned with doing things right; effectiveness in doing the right things."³

Traditionally in social work we have referred to "administration" of an agency; currently it is popular to talk about the "management" of the agency. I think this is because we have been through a period of great criticism of social service agencies because of spiralling costs of programs and lack of accountability for money spent in relation to services delivered. I guess management sounds more business like - more as if we are in control. Regardless of what we call the process, in managing/administering a social service agency we must be accountable not only for the money spent but also for the quality of the professional services we deliver.

I believe, however, that there is a subtle degree of difference in administration and management that should be considered in career planning. Management encompasses the activities or the "doing" of management, the execution of the managerial functions; administration is more concerned with the "process" - the "deciding" - the "planning for" in carrying out the activities. Does an administrator manage? Does a manager administer? It may be appropriate to answer both of these questions affirmatively but modify the answers by pointing to the difference in degree of what managers at different levels do, the different activities they engage in, the scope of their responsibilities, and their relationship with the social, political, and economic environment. Administration includes all the managerial functions but is broader than management in the scope, degree, and kind of responsibilities assigned to administrators.

As the manager moves up the ladder from "supervisor" to

"middle management level" to "top executive," at each move she enlarges her administrative function and modifies the scope of her managerial functions in certain areas. That is, she assigns elements of the internal management activities to staff. She must relate and coordinate her activities to more parts of the total operation and to some external operations. When you get to be the executive - the manager has overall responsibility to relate her total operation to the particular operation of each part of the totality, to assure that all parts are synchronized and are necessary for the total product or business; she moves outside the enterprise to relate the activity of the business to the environment in which she operates. The effective administrator uses the "expertise" in her staff in this process, but the final responsibility for the "wholeness" of the enterprise rests with her.

Considering this difference between management and administration, as you move up your career ladder, two questions are presented: "Am I prepared for the next level job?" - and "Will I be satisfied with the change in function?" - that is, will I derive satisfaction in spending all my time in "planning for" as opposed to "operating" - will I be satisfied working through people or do I prefer to work directly with the client or consumer?

Definition of Skill

At the Fourth NASW Professional Symposium in October 1975, Dr. Harold Lewis presented a very stimulating paper on "The Structure of Professional Skill."⁴ I am going to borrow from his paper to describe the concept of "skill" as I use it this morning. Skill focuses on professional competence. Skill is knowledge based and is

manifested in action requiring the implementation of a method or procedure. Skill is directly observable in the act, it is not the action or product. So Skill is knowledge, actions, intentions, values, style, and method. Skill implies an ability which can be developed. The principle criterion for skillfulness must be effective action under varying conditions.

SKILLS IN ADMINISTRATION/MANAGEMENT

The skills of the effective manager/administrator can be grouped into technical, human, and conceptual skills. These skills are interrelated and to some degree interdependent in directing the activities of other persons and in achieving the objectives of a program effectively and efficiently. They are so interrelated it is difficult to separate them but for the purposes of our discussion, I am going to speak to them separately.

All three skills are important at every management level, but the technical, human, and conceptual skills of the manager-administrator vary in relative importance and emphasis at different levels of responsibility.

Technical Skills

These skills have to do with performing the technical activities in the day by day operation of the agency. Technical skill involves knowledge of the business enterprise - knowledge of and know how of management - and specialized knowledge needed to carry out your particular function in your job. It also involves analytical ability in your specialty and facility in the use of tools and techniques required to carry out your job.

Technical skill is necessary for efficient operations. These skills have greatest importance at middle management and lower levels of management. As the manager moves up the ladder and further away from operations, she depends on the technical skills of her subordinates and utilizes her human and conceptual skills more.

However, a critical management skill at all levels is decision making. To be skillful in decision making requires that the manager must have sufficient knowledge of the business enterprise and with sufficient understanding of all phases of the work she oversees to assure that each person in her unit, division, department, or agency is functioning at first rate effectiveness and efficiency.

It is my conviction, and many people do not agree with me and some of you may not agree -- my conviction is that the administrator of a social service system, the top executive, must have knowledge of and skill in social work and social work values as well as knowledge of, competence in, and skills in management sufficient to effectively use the expertise in her staff and to make the necessary decisions on program objectives involving human values, a judgment that requires a body of knowledge somewhat different from the judgments that are made on production or marketing objectives in a manufacturing plant.

My conviction is why I am here today - because I want you to move up the ladder and become the top executive in the social service system.

Human Skill

All social workers are familiar with human skills and hopefully all social workers have expertise in this area. These skills involve the ability to work with individuals and groups, knowledge of and understanding of individual and organizational behavior, ability to

motivate others, to build cooperative effort, to be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of your staff, to be aware of your own behavior and its meaning.

Human skill is essential to effective management at all levels. As you know, human skill cannot be worn one day and left at home the next day. It must be an integral part of the manager's whole being.

Such a person works to create an atmosphere of approval and security in which subordinates feel free to express themselves without fear of censure or ridicule, by encouraging them to participate in the planning and carrying out of the things which directly affect them. Such a manager is sensitive to the needs and motivations of her staff so that she can judge the possible reactions to and outcomes of various actions she may want to take and with this sensitivity be willing to act in a way that takes these perceptions into account. The manager with human skills is able to help staff cope with resistance to change.

"Communication" is a human skill of high importance. The manager must be able to communicate with individuals and groups, to articulate what the program is about, what we hope to achieve - in a way that can be understood both by staff and by the lay public. The manager must be equally skillful in communicating to others, in their own context, what she means by her behavior. Communication is not a one way street - it goes in many ways. As you know, we can't communicate by talking at people.

Conceptual Skill

Conceptual skill is most important in the top executive and upper management echelon where policy and programs are developed.

Conceptual skill sets the tone of an organization and its future direction. It involves the ability to see the organization as a whole - to understand the relationship of all parts of the business to the total organization - to be able to relate the business to the environment - to provide leadership to staff - to create a climate for staff to work effectively and in harmony - to provide leadership in the community and other publics related to the place and contribution of the agency to the community - sensitivity to economic, social, and political conditions affecting the agency - ability to evaluate the total operation both as to its internal operation and in relation to the environment with readiness to make decisions for change, if appropriate, even though they may be unpopular decisions.

The top administrator is the one who has to make the important, final, and sometimes hard decisions. Decisions made at this level must be such that they advance the overall welfare of the total organization. The success of the decision depends not only on the conceptual skill of the administrator but also on the conceptual skill of the people who carry out the decision. Conceptual skill of staff is developed and fostered and is dependent on the quality of leadership and the climate created by the administrator to enable staff to perform effectively.

Chester Barnard describes conceptual skill in describing the functions of all executives when he states that the functions do not stand alone but rather are "aspects of a process of organization as a whole."⁵ He described the essential aspects of the process as "the sensing of the organization as a whole and the total situation

relative to it" ... and "the terms pertinent to the process are 'feeling', 'judgment', 'sense', 'proportion', 'balance', and 'appropriateness'."

SUMMARY

Although I have said that technical skills are most important at the middle management and lower levels of management, that conceptual skills are most important in upper management and top executive levels, and that human skills are essential at all levels of management, I do want to emphasize that all three are inter-related and are necessary, in different dimensions in management at all levels in the agency.

Now there are two other skills, which are part of the above group, but which I want to highlight because I think women in management have not been given the opportunity too often to develop skills in these areas. Somehow the men seem to reserve this activity for themselves - you know they think only the men can talk to the legislature!

I am referring to skill in inter-governmental relations and in negotiations.

Skill in Inter-Governmental Relations

The social agency manager or executive must have skill in the political process. The social worker, whether in a public or private agency -- whether in private practice or in practice in an agency setting -- should be prepared with knowledge of economics, government, and political factors to be able to work with the various legislative bodies and other public and private groups we need to support our programs. This work extends not only to seeking appropriations support but also the shaping and direction of social policy. Here

again we need to guard against just "rhetoric" and develop skills in communication so that we can communicate the pros and cons on issues. Knowledge of and competence in the programs and social policies for which we are seeking support and understanding are essential.

Skill in Negotiations

Skill in the "negotiating process" is a skill we need in many walks of life, but particularly in the social services system we need to understand that the means justify the end, and thus take appropriate steps as we move through the negotiating process to maintaining our personal integrity and the integrity of the profession and our ethical values. To do this we must be knowledgeable of our objectives, be sure of where we want to get, and be sensitive to the values and significance of "trade-offs." It is the "trade-off" process in negotiation that demands great skill. A "trade-off" often must be made. This can be a very delicate process. Social issues and programmatic concerns often involve ethical issues and pose dilemmas and difficulties. Here we need to guard against rationalization that permits principles to be compromised. On the other hand, to hold to a position because we know it is the most desirable position can be damaging to the constructive resolution of an issue. Our trade off may be such that we get our "foot in the door" -- make a trade-off that gives us at least a position in the right direction of where we want to go. It may be better for us to have some impact on the right direction, rather than to have no impact at all. Small steps forward, or some honest errors in judgment, will not deny our

self-respect, but the compromising of principles deny the individual's integrity and the integrity of the profession.

Making the Quantum Jump from Casework to Administration

Casework skills, those I have described in discussing human skills, are essential skills for effective management. These skills will help you as a manager to manage inter-group relations, to establish empathy with co-workers and subordinates but to remain objective and maintain a diagnostic approach to problem solving.

The basic social work process, that of study (gathering facts), diagnosis (putting the facts together and assessing their inter-relationship and analyzing the meaning) and action (intervention - treatment - strategies) is the same process to be used in problem solving in administering a business enterprise.

However, there is a major difference in transferring the human skills learned in casework and the social work process to a business enterprise - and this is where I think the "quantum jump" occurs.

That difference is that in the social work process, human skills are used to help the individual or the group - as an administrator/manager the objective is to help the agency even if it means firing staff.

This is hard for some caseworkers moving into management to move from helping the individual to focus on and to strive for the good health of the agency. There has been some reference in literature that persons with clerical training cannot be effective managers - but I see no basis for this assumption. Skills are knowledge based and can be learned, and can through practice be developed.

If experienced, skilled practitioners at the casework level

could command salaries at a level of the agency top management team, I could seriously ask you why you want to be managers? Two key jobs in a social service system are: first - the direct delivery of services because the quality of services depends on how well the caseworker delivers the services, and the second job is the first level supervisor. Both of these jobs are probably at the lowest salary level for professional jobs in the agency.

We have been plagued too long in the social welfare field with salaries for the direct delivery of services too low and not commensurate with the skill of the experienced professional educated practitioner. I would like to see movement to improve the salary and status for these two jobs so that people would have a choice in continuing in the job or moving up the ladder to management in relation to job skill and satisfaction and not salary. This would improve working conditions not only for women but also for men. It might also open up more management jobs for women with less competition for such jobs from men.

In Conclusion: Some Comments on Women in Management

Accept that women are and can be effective and efficient managers and top executives. Feel positive about your job, if you are a manager, and positive about your ability to handle managerial and executive jobs.

Dress and look like a manager.

Establish a feeling of being comfortable in management and not see yourself in competition with the male management. Competition can be healthy but it also can be negative and destructive. The negative competitive attitude is reflected in your work and prevents you from being objective and fair minded in your work with the male managerial group.

Be knowledgeable about your job - be well prepared in management meetings - do your homework. In some agencies you may have to work a little harder than the men to get recognition - but you will get recognition.

Be objective in seeking help from your co-workers, both male and female. Be friendly and helpful to your male co-workers even though you know they are "trying to pick your brains." You can pick their brains, too.

Be aggressive in the manner of the iron hand in the velvet glove. Be firm in seeking what is rightfully yours and the recognition that should come your way because of your performance and position. You can be aggressive and firm, if you are knowledgeable about your job, without being negatively competitive.

The problems uniquely attributed by some to women managers - passivity, over-compliance, lack of career planning - are also problems for many men managers. But these problems, if they are problems that exist, can be corrected. Set about career planning - examine what it is you want to do and where you want to go - and then, prepare yourself for this step, if necessary, by acquiring the knowledge you need.

Your present agency may not be organized in a way that you can plan a career ladder - you may have to move to another agency where there are more managerial opportunities.

In Hennig and Jardim's book "The Managerial Women"⁶ it compares female to male managers. It states men see risk as loss or gain - danger or opportunity but women see risk as entirely negative - as danger - as hurt - and avoid it as best one can. Women are urged

to model themselves after the "gamesmen." This is a mistake. For each gamesman, who loves to cut decks and to gamble, there are probably two or three company men at the executive management level who would be happy if they could eliminate all risk from both career and business.

It is a mistake to think that reaching the top means copying those who have already made it. Styles of management change. If you are technically competent in your business and have managerial skills, your own style of management utilizing this knowledge and these skills may be more effective than that of those already at the top. Corporations, agencies, government need new qualities of leadership - responsive not only to economic and technological change, but also to the new breed of more critical and self-affirmative employees. There was a time when an employee was offered a promotion and if he did not take it, he was out of a job. Today managers have to know how to deal with employees who may give consideration first to where they want to live, how much more time are they willing to spend on the job, does the family want to move - will the new job interfere with my life style - rather than to promotion, status in the company, and salary increases and may refuse the job. They are competent people and management cannot afford to fire them.

Talented modern managers who follow the model recommended by Hennig and Jardim may stumble not because they lack strategy or daring but because they are insensitive to individual need for dignity and respect. Without human concerns and understanding of differences, even a fair minded manager may fail to stimulate the

trust necessary for effectiveness in the modern agency or organization. That is one reason why executives have become more interested in the humanization of work and in new experiments in democratic participation.

Some women in management adopt a behavior style that their work goal is to be something like a well oiled machine running at top speed. These women become cold, domineering people and don't move up much beyond middle management levels.

Women in management who attempt to combine emotional development with business competence - who enjoy the people they work with as well as the tasks they do, who have a balanced social, family and work life - can absorb lessons in strategies and tactics, in use of conceptual and human skills, without modeling themselves on stereotype. So, too, can men in management!

Good luck, as you move up the managerial ladder.

Don't be afraid to be a pioneer - to move into agency or organization management as the first woman in management in that business - the men will be glad to have you - and they will pick your brains!

FOOTNOTES

1. Herman Stein, "Administration." In Encyclopedia of Social Work, edited by Harry R. Lurie, pp. 58-63. New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1965.
2. Harold Koontz and Cyril O'Donnell, Principles of Management: An Analysis of the Managerial Function. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972.
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4. Harold Lewis, "The Future Role of the Social Service Administration." Administration in Social Work 1 (2). 1977.
5. Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of an Executive. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938.
6. Margaret Hennig and Anne Jardim, The Managerial Women. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977.